

2019-07-24

# Natural Law and the 'Resistance': A Normative Approach to the Skywalker Narrative in The Last Jedi

Gould, J

<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/14698>

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10.1007/s11196-019-09640-5

International Journal for the Semiotics of Law - Revue internationale de Semiotique juridique

Springer Science and Business Media LLC

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Title Page

Title - Natural law and the 'Resistance': a normative approach to the Skywalker narrative in  
*The Last Jedi*

## **Abstract**

The motion picture *The Last Jedi* involves important decisions and actions taken by the protagonist of the original Star Wars trilogy, Luke Skywalker. It will be argued that Luke's narrative in *The Last Jedi* can be explored through analysing new natural law thought. In particular it draws on Robert P. George's discussion of the good (human flourishing) to consider whether the opposition provided by Luke Skywalker can be seen as a successful form of opposition to restore public morality. The contrast between Skywalker's morality and the behaviour of the First Order will be established. It will be argued that the Skywalker narrative symbolises public morality against the politics of the First Order.

It will be analysed whether Luke's sacrifice in *The Last Jedi* can provide legal restraint to a militant invading force. This will further be shown to be helpful to legal philosophy in negotiating the boundaries over natural rights. As such, it will be shown that key features of George's natural law reasoning can be usefully applied to examine Luke's actions, and this will shed light upon concepts such as liberty, sacrifice and fear. Legal idealism in the form of natural law will provide further insight into the jurisprudence that pervades Luke's narrative arch to demonstrate the film's wider relevance.

**Keywords** Jurisprudence – natural law – self-preservation – natural rights – public morality – sacrifice

## **1 Introduction**

The purpose of this article is to engage with the legal and political morality of Skywalker narrative in the motion picture *The Last Jedi*<sup>1</sup> (*TLJ*). By considering this media it will be argued that the Skywalker narrative can be explored through analysing Robert P. George's new natural law thought. Luke Skywalker's actions will convey how law as a public morality can provide a legal restraint against a militant force. This is because the concept of public morality will be shown to be significant to legal philosophy in negotiating the boundaries over natural rights. Luke's narrative will be situated within a theoretical context that establishes Skywalker symbolises public morality against the politics of the First Order.

The new natural law critique in this article will enable a conclusion surrounding Luke's journey to be given. To establish this conclusion, it will require a movement to be drawn from the arguments of George's new natural law theory and the Hobbesian condition. This will establish a contrast between Skywalker's morality and the behaviour of the First Order.

To establish the wider jurisprudential relevance of Luke's symbolic resistance to the First Order this will require a tripartite consideration: first, whether a good based opposition can be seen in the opposition provided by Luke Skywalker to the First Order; second, whether Luke's sacrifice in *TLJ* meets the 'goods-rights synthesis'; and third, it will be detailed if following the last two considerations Luke's movements in *TLJ* can be seen as an attempt to restore public morality. This will show that features of George's natural law reasoning can be applied to analyse Luke's actions.

## **2 George's contribution to new natural law theory**

This article draws upon Robert P. George's contribution to new natural law theory. It will use this theory of new natural law to analyse Skywalker's public morality contrasted against the politics of the First Order. New natural law theory is the philosophical tradition George defends and utilises.<sup>2</sup> This development of a new classical theory of natural law has offered a theologically-informed, systematic philosophical explanation for human life that offers an integrated account of practical reason, morality and legal philosophy.

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<sup>1</sup> [40].

<sup>2</sup> See [19, 21, 22, 24, 31]. For the classic restatement see [17].

An explanation for this is that George embodies a natural law tradition that has always resisted moral relativism and defended certain moral absolutes.<sup>3</sup> George has, for example, contributed to contentious ethical debates surrounding abortion, human cloning and sexual morality.<sup>4</sup> This approach has been criticised as a conduit to communicate Roman Catholic conservative ethics.<sup>5</sup> George does build from the moral theology of Thomas Aquinas to evidence an awareness of theological traditions of metaphysically-rooted reasoning.<sup>6</sup> That being said, in *The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion and Morality in Crisis*, George states: ‘the natural law is ... in principle accessible to human reason and not dependent on ... divine revelation’.<sup>7</sup> As such, although new natural law does not expressly rely upon appeal to the metaphysical, there is an underlying reliance upon divine revelation in the use of scholastic legal reasoning and the natural law<sup>8</sup> to reach pragmatic conclusions in line with the common good. It is consequently important here that George’s Christian moral realism is not delimited to the immediately personal but instead has wider ethical and practical implications.

The claim is that there are basic (universal) moral goods. The natural law jurisprudence that George advances is an account of these basic human goods and reasons for action that they provide.<sup>9</sup> There is a central focus upon practical reason in his work,<sup>10</sup> which is a clear reflection of the importance of practical reasoning to the Grisez School.<sup>11</sup> Further, there is a concern for justice,<sup>12</sup> human liberty<sup>13</sup> and ultimately protection against the state in George’s work.<sup>14</sup> For instance, George is very clear in that he draws from a ‘tradition of natural law thinking about morality, justice and human rights’.<sup>15</sup> As such, a function of legal thought can be to stabilise and resolve ambiguities.<sup>16</sup> It is these factors that substantiate the central claim that key features of George’s natural law reasoning and theory of natural law can usefully be applied to analyse the Skywalker narrative. George’s approach can transcend legal jurisdiction and be evaluated more widely, embracing influential cinematography and media

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<sup>3</sup> For example: [15, 33, 16, and 18].

<sup>4</sup> For instance, see: ([21] pp. 112-114 [abortion]); ([25] pp. 72-73 [human cloning]); (and [28] p. 118 [abortion].)

<sup>5</sup> [5] pp. 179, 180; [3] p. 167; [8] pp. 293, 294.

<sup>6</sup> [23] pp. 64-66.

<sup>7</sup> [25] p. 169.

<sup>8</sup> See John Finnis famously write in *Natural Law and Natural Rights* that if you ‘accept the arguments of the book you will have a strong reason to believe in an Uncaused Cause of the Universe.’ [14] p. 372.

<sup>9</sup> [24] p. 229.

<sup>10</sup> See ([21] p. 39); ([23] p. 3); ([25] p. 195).

<sup>11</sup> [34] pp. 12-14. The term ‘Grisez School’ is given to authors that have developed new natural law thought. In particular, the Grisez School was started by Germain Grisez, and was subsequently developed through collaboration with Joseph M Boyle, John Finnis, and Robert George [23] p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> [23] p. 130.

<sup>13</sup> [19] p. 219.

<sup>14</sup> [24] p. 114.

<sup>15</sup> [25] p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> [1] p. 1098.

entertainment such as *TLJ*. An engagement with law and practical reason will effectively provide analysis of Luke's narrative arch.

### 3 The contrast between George's new natural law and Hobbesian theory

To explore the legal and political morality of Luke Skywalker the new natural law thought of Robert George requires further critique. By developing a clear contrast between the arguments of George's new natural law theory and the thought of Thomas Hobbes, this will set up the later analysis suggesting that through a new natural law lens Skywalker symbolises a public morality against the oppressive regime of the First Order.

The Star Wars episodes (currently I – VIII) revolve around the Skywalker narrative.<sup>17</sup> In *TLJ* the narrative focuses upon Luke Skywalker. The state of the galaxy in *TLJ* requires action to be taken by Skywalker. In the preceding motion picture, *The Force Awakens*,<sup>18</sup> the militant, invading First Order destroy the planet Hosnian Prime. This planet served as the headquarters of the Galactic Senate and capital of the New Republic – in effect, the governing body for the wider galaxy.<sup>19</sup> In the Skywalker narrative, the government is in disarray at the time of *TLJ*. Without an apparent form of governance or legal order the First Order are subject to little law and enforce tyranny through fear and power. The thought of the philosopher Thomas Hobbes thought may here be useful because of the so-called 'state of nature'. In Hobbes' hypothetical condition, the state of nature existed when there 'were no common power able to restrain individuals, no law and no law enforcement'.<sup>20</sup> This state of nature presents a bleak picture based upon a pessimistic assessment of unrestrained human behaviour.<sup>21</sup>

No legal enforcement or individual power was present or able to restrain the First Order. For Hobbes, if restraint were removed (i.e., there was no law), then to prevent invasion of personal property, it follows that individuals should do whatever was necessary to avoid entering into this dark, repressive state of nature.<sup>22</sup> This hypothetical situation to improve the human condition was Hobbes' 'starting point for natural law teaching.'<sup>23</sup> Natural law teaching is shown to engage with the state of nature. The Hobbesian condition helps to identify a state of nature upon which Luke's actions can be assessed.

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<sup>17</sup> [35] p. 295.

<sup>18</sup> [2].

<sup>19</sup> [41].

<sup>20</sup> [37] p. 40.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> [47] p. 264.

Further there is a turning away from George's reliance upon divine revelation in the Hobbesian condition. In considering political theology, the philosopher and sociologist Slavoj Žižek – a member of the wider Slovenian Lacanian School<sup>24</sup> – provides a helpful approach. Žižek acknowledges decline in Judaeo-Christian religious belief in the West.<sup>25</sup> Žižek is critical of the Christian church – for instance, he generalises when suggesting that the Christian church provides, 'a defense against death.'<sup>26</sup> Yet Žižek believes the rise of secular humanism does not unburden the human subject, rather, the 'liberated subject now finds themselves in a suffocating closure.'<sup>27</sup> This presents an anthropological political ideology that finds expression in Hobbesian theory. For according to Hobbes human beings have a right to do what is necessary for their preservation even if that means harming others.<sup>28</sup> The human subject is granted freedom but attached to this are wider consequences. This draws comparisons with the actions taken by the First Order – an assessment of the dark realities of human behaviour. The First Order subjugate humanity in their quest for power and commit murder and terrorism to do so.

This draws a contrast with George's new natural law approach. George's monograph *Making Men Moral*<sup>29</sup> outlines the central belief that natural law can contribute to making man moral. For although laws cannot make humans moral 'in any direct or immediate way',<sup>30</sup> George argues that the natural law can legitimately contribute to the legal enforcement of morality.<sup>31</sup> The specific way that George's new natural law theory contributes to the legal enforcement of morality is by proposing a public morality with a variety of different religious and philosophical commitments, with a 'reasonable consensus on certain shared matters of urgent concern'.<sup>32</sup> The state of nature present at the time of *TLJ* (shown by galactic war caused by an invading power), indicates that there are matters of urgent concern present; the galaxy is in distress.

It will later in this article be suggested that George views law, by shaping morality, directing a public morality 'based on certain civil interests.'<sup>33</sup> These civil interests are those which reasonable people share, and certain principles of liberty and equality that reasonable people are prepared to affirm, regardless of ideology.<sup>34</sup> George proposes a public morality based upon reasonable civil interests, and law is seen to be a form of public morality

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<sup>24</sup> [56] p. x.

<sup>25</sup> [45] p. 96.

<sup>26</sup> [57].

<sup>27</sup> [45] p. 96. See also [55] pp. 197-199.

<sup>28</sup> [58] p. 239.

<sup>29</sup> [21].

<sup>30</sup> Ibid p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> [29] pp. 27, 28.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid p. 27.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

that secures individual rights. George hence rejects a natural law position that relies upon power given to the sovereign under social contractarianism.<sup>35</sup> As such, while the Hobbesian condition provides a starting point for natural law teaching and identifies a state of nature, George proposes a method to move from the state of nature. George believes that the common good generates obligations in justice,<sup>36</sup> with an emphasis upon restoring order.<sup>37</sup>

To escape from the hypothetical ‘state of nature’ identified by Hobbes, in *De Cive* Hobbes categorised the first foundation of natural rights as one of self-preservation.<sup>38</sup> This concept is the overriding contribution of Hobbesian thought. Although for Hobbes’s natural law,<sup>39</sup> construed as a right to self-preservation,<sup>40</sup> it can be prescribed that ‘each man protect his life and limbs as much as he can’,<sup>41</sup> this is extended by George. A contrast is drawn in that George’s emphasis moves further from personal self-preservation towards the ‘reasonable consensus on certain shared matters of urgent concern’.<sup>42</sup> George uses public morality to refute the ‘Hobbesian invitation to abandon our moral aspirations in favour of scepticism, will, and power.’<sup>43</sup> As such, George adopts a concept of public morality to reject the Hobbesian state of nature<sup>44</sup> and it will be later shown this movement provides a form of protection against the state. This introduction provides context for later discussion of Skywalker’s morality and the behaviour of the First Order.

#### **4 Self-preservation brought about by fear and isolation**

This article will now turn to draw key themes and concepts in Luke’s narrative that will benefit from the application of George’s new natural law thought. A key emotion displayed by Luke in *TLJ* is that of fear. Luke lives in self-imposed exile on the isolated planet Ach-to and is fearful about returning for two reasons. First, he is fearful about any potential (lack of) impact his return to warfare may bring. As Luke states: ‘You don’t need Luke Skywalker. You think what? That I could walk out with a laser sword and face down the whole First Order? What did you think was going to happen here?’<sup>45</sup> This displays Luke’s dismissal of his own abilities arising from fear.

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<sup>35</sup> [50] p. 25.

<sup>36</sup> [30] p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> [37] Ch I, 13-14; [36] I i, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid Ch. XIII – The natural law of self-preservation is pursuant upon Hobbes’ discussion of the laws of nature where men live in ‘that condition called Warre’ - ibid Ch. XIII, p. 62.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid Ch. XIV.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid p. 27.

<sup>42</sup> [29] pp. 27, 28.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 20.

<sup>45</sup> [40].



Second, Luke fears reconnecting and making acquaintances given his failure to train his nephew Ben Solo as a Jedi Knight. Luke's shame looms large over him as he lives in isolation on Ach-to. Fear can be defined as '[a]n unpleasant emotion caused by the threat of danger, pain, or harm.'<sup>46</sup> This is certainly the case for Luke Skywalker – his fear stems from both the danger his return may cause for others and also pain he experiences given his earlier failure involving Ben Solo. Fear stems from past negative outcomes and future use of his abilities.

It is at least arguable, however, that fear has always been part of the Skywalker narrative. Jedi Master Yoda warned Luke's father Anakin as a child, before Anakin turned evil: 'To the dark side, fear leads. To anger and to hate. To suffering.'<sup>47</sup> This warning was given the very first time that Yoda and Anakin met. Yoda sensed the fear in Anakin and warned him accordingly.<sup>48</sup> Given this family history emotional fear was then transferred to Anakin's son, Luke. The writer Ellerhoff notes the fear that Luke experienced in the Original Trilogy,<sup>49</sup> and its capacity to lead Luke to join the 'dark side'.<sup>50</sup> Luke feared his uncontrolled emotions would lead him to evil in the Original Trilogy:

'Luke first recognises his real fears. He realises that he's afraid of becoming evil, fears that his weaknesses of unrestrained anger and impatience would prevent him from becoming the Jedi he yearns to be. These fears are based on his failure to fully trust himself to resist temptations.'<sup>51</sup>

It is evident that Luke encountered fear in the Original Trilogy surrounding temptation to join the Dark Side. The fear caused by Darth Vader and the Emperor by pursuing Luke in *Return of the Jedi* is a pressing problem for Luke: 'The two primary leading figures in the Empire, Darth Vader and the Emperor himself, through their actions and ideology, challenge clearly the individual [Luke].'<sup>52</sup> Luke fears his allegiance to the Jedi will waiver after being tested by Darth Vader and the Emperor at the conclusion of *Return of the Jedi*.<sup>53</sup> This fear also stemmed from Luke discovering his parental connection to Darth Vader and the subsequent emotional pain that this would bring to him and his companions.

It was earlier established that this fear results in Luke living on the isolated planet of Ach-To at the beginning of *TLJ*. Fear is the answer to the question posed at the end of *The Force Awakens*: why is Luke living as a recluse?<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> [11] p. 127.

<sup>47</sup> [6] p. 231.

<sup>48</sup> This was a very realistic fear given that Anakin Skywalker 'turned to the dark side' and became Darth Vader.

<sup>49</sup> The Original Trilogy consists of Episodes IV-VI.

<sup>50</sup> [12] p. 46.

<sup>51</sup> [4] p. 87.

<sup>52</sup> [54] p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> [44].

<sup>54</sup> [2].

Fear has resulted in Luke adopting an isolated, self-preservationist approach to life. Fear is a sign of Luke's fragile emotional state. As a result, when approached by the main protagonist in *TLJ* - Rey - Luke refuses to join or train her and help the small military force, the Resistance. This refusal to engage in the larger conflict can be seen under natural law as an act of self-preservation. Luke is not only trying to protect himself, however, but attempting to avoid training Rey and also preventing his actions from causing further harm to the galaxy.

The fear of failure requires intervention from Yoda in *TLJ*. Yoda appears to Luke at the site of the ancient Jedi texts on Ach-To. He confronts Luke's fears:

'Pass on what you have learned. Strength, mastery. But weakness, folly, failure also. Yes failure most of all. The greatest teacher, failure is. Luke, we are what they grow beyond. That is the true burden of all masters.'<sup>55</sup>

This challenges Luke's fears of failure (fuelling his self-imposed exile) through confronting his act of self-preservation. His fears about his past failure and preventing further harm are constructively channelled by Yoda into helping Rey and the Resistance.

A discussion about self-preservation in *TLJ* invokes George's thought. An approach of rationality based on self-preservation has influenced George. George believes that because of the influence of Thomas Hobbes, the view that human nature is ultimately constituted on emotional desires is prominent in the intellectual life of modern culture. This basis is ultimately refuted because as a conservative Roman Catholic, George accepts the Roman Catholic Church's view of human good and nature, in that natural goods give reasons for action, rather than liberty per se.<sup>56</sup> Yet, the dual presentation of rationality driven by desires and revelation has found modern application in George's thought. He admits that 'there are aspects of human nature that are relevant to practical thinking and can indeed be known prior to practical reasoning.'<sup>57</sup> Reason, in the form of practical reason, has been modified and developed to become a large factor in his work.<sup>58</sup>

In his monograph *Making Men Moral*, George engages the position of Hobbes, who, in line with his theoretical successor David Hume, believed that 'the Thoughts are to the desires as Scouts and Spies to range abroad, and find the way to things desired'.<sup>59</sup> This view makes clear that desires are prior to and determine our thoughts. Instead George suggests the intrinsic human goods and basic reason for action can be sought as *ends* in themselves.

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<sup>55</sup> [40].

<sup>56</sup> [25] pp. 266, 267.

<sup>57</sup> [21] p. 89.

<sup>58</sup> See generally – [26] chapters 2 and 6.

<sup>59</sup> [37] pt. 1, ch. 8.

This prevents practical reason being merely prescribed by emotions/reason, a 'mere instrument in the service of desire, which would prevent rationally motivated choice guided by practical intellect.'<sup>60</sup> Practical reason is dictated by the good.<sup>61</sup> As has been shown in this understanding of new natural law offered by George, the basic goods engage the practical reason, and provide reasons for action 'precisely insofar as *they* are constitutive aspects of human flourishing.'<sup>62</sup> Desires and emotion do not on their own interact with practical reason. As such self-preservation can be seen to be influential in the selfless, flourishing nature of the good.

Luke's isolation is not only caused by fear preventing him from engaging directly with conflict. This self-preservationist stance is not a selfish one. It was earlier outlined that this normative behaviour is considered necessary by Luke to prevent his own actions causing further harm to the galaxy. His isolation is built upon the fear drawn from earlier failure and is designed to prevent further suffering caused by any direct or indirect actions.

This refusal to engage in conflict is not new. It is submitted that a motif of Luke refusing to participate in conflict can also be found in the original Star Wars trilogy, in particular episode VI, *Return of the Jedi*.<sup>63</sup> Luke's refusal to engage in conflict is shown by throwing away his weapon and appealing to Darth Vader's compassion as a father in the Death Star's throne room in *The Return of the Jedi*.<sup>64</sup> Ellerhoff writes: 'Luke Skywalker's triumph is not light over darkness. By offering himself as a sacrifice, he refuses to act on either side of the conflict.'<sup>65</sup> As such, Luke's refusal to engage in the conflict facing the galaxy in the sequel trilogy builds on his previous experience. Luke is considered an isolated figure in *TLJ* through his personal choice. The fear found in Luke's refusal to engage is not brought about by fear of undergoing personal harm; but rather, a fear caused by potential unintended consequences that stem from his life experience.

## 5 Expectation

The act of isolation taken by Luke and also his refusal to join the Resistance in *TLJ* may further arise from the significant pressures placed upon him. Throughout the original Star Wars trilogy, Luke Skywalker was viewed as the 'hero'.<sup>66</sup> This follows from Joseph Campbell's hero trajectory that has been seen as a significant influence on the Star Wars narrative.<sup>67</sup> In particular it is widely recognised that George Lucas drew upon Campbell's work

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<sup>60</sup> [21] p. 12.

<sup>61</sup> [23] p. 85.

<sup>62</sup> [21] p. 103.

<sup>63</sup> [44].

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> [12] p. 50.

<sup>66</sup> [46] p. 205.

<sup>67</sup> [7].

when writing *A New Hope*.<sup>68</sup> Ebert notes that Lucas was inspired by Campbell's mythological work to fashion 'a screenplay that owes much to mankind's oldest stories.'<sup>69</sup> Gordon further elaborates on Lucas' contribution:

'Lucas' achievement is to construct a coherent myth out of his pastiche of pop culture. The multiple cross-references, the archetypal character and situation, give it both reinforcement and deep resonances for an audience which may not consciously recognize the sources, but will still respond emotionally to the conventions. Moreover, at its most fundamental level, the plot partakes of the timeless elements of epic myth.'<sup>70</sup>

The enduring popularity of the Star Wars franchise has been explained in terms of the theories of Joseph Campbell and his idea of the monomyth.<sup>71</sup> The narrative is presented through the depiction of the myth of Luke as the 'hero'. For instance, Gordon notes Luke changes from, 'ordinary boy raised to the status of *mythic* hero'.<sup>72</sup> The mythological expression of Luke as the 'hero' drawn against the 'villainy' of the First Order will be shown later in this article to contribute to the legal and political debate involving public morality. As such, by drawing from Campbell's expertise, mythological dimensions in the Star Wars franchise may be explained by drawing connections to debates surrounding contentious issues. This situates the mythological discussion of the Skywalker narrative in *TLJ* and so illustrates the film's wider relevance. By highlighting mythical actions undertaken by the protagonist Skywalker that speak into contemporary debate, the appeal of Star Wars to a mass audience can be demonstrated.

In a story focussed upon Luke's mythical journey to becoming a hero (discovery, training and victory), it is understandable that the character of Luke was subject to a high level of expectation. Luke was anticipated to become the hero for the Rebellion and so in *TLJ* this thematic expectation is transferred to the new form of Rebellion: the Resistance. For instance, Ellerhoff notes that: 'Kenobi is convinced [in the original trilogy] that Luke is the only one who can defeat Vader and the Emperor'.<sup>73</sup> A high level of expectation was placed upon Luke Skywalker to defeat the evil Sith and redeem the galaxy. In *TLJ*, that pressure is again evident as shown by Luke's refusal to leave Ach-To and join the Resistance, which builds from the natural law thought which suggested that self-preservation was brought about by fear.

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<sup>68</sup> [42] p. 432.

<sup>69</sup> [10] p. 432.

<sup>70</sup> [32] pp. 319-320.

<sup>71</sup> [54] p. 1. See [7].

<sup>72</sup> [32] p. 324 – *emphasis added*.

<sup>73</sup> [12] p. 47. This builds upon Luke's earlier success in Episode IV where very shortly after joining the Rebellion he triumphantly destroyed the Death Star and so immediately displayed a very promising future.

Throughout the Original Trilogy the narrative is structured around Luke as protagonist. Vinci notes that ‘Luke epitomizes the definitive influence and social value of the individual, and this is coded in the films as morally and ethically good as well as spiritually ideal.’<sup>74</sup> With the galaxy being oppressed by the Empire, Luke as an individual is subject to extreme pressure to restore freedom. This leads Eberl to question: ‘Must Luke unavoidably shoulder the burden of saving the galaxy?’<sup>75</sup> If Luke must shoulder such a burden then it is evident that a level of pressure like this must be extremely intense. Luke’s immediate future actions are set out for him, and the narrative in the Old Trilogy is centred on how Luke fulfils this role as protagonist.<sup>76</sup>

A similar expectation was placed upon Luke’s father, Anakin, who was the main protagonist in the Prequel Trilogy<sup>77</sup> before he turned to the Dark Side.<sup>78</sup> It is arguable that this level of pressure contributed to Anakin’s fall to the Dark Side.<sup>79</sup> As such, the expectation placed upon individual protagonists through the entirety of the Star Wars saga is significant and this level of anticipation is further noted by Eberl: ‘Luke, like his father ... is both the new and last hope for restoring freedom to the galaxy.’<sup>80</sup> Luke succeeded in meeting the expectation others held of him by defeating the Sith between episodes IV – VI.<sup>81</sup> His success in persuading his father to reject the Dark Side caused the Emperor’s death in *Return of the Jedi*,<sup>82</sup> securing victory for the Rebellion and fulfilling the expectation placed upon him in the Original Trilogy. There has always been significant expectation heaped upon Luke to fulfil his mythical ‘hero’ role which provides context to his actions in the Original Trilogy, and this is again present in *TLJ* which gives context and contributes to Luke’s isolation.

## **6 Luke’s sacrifice engages the goods-rights synthesis**

This section will now move on to engage with natural law thought to show that Luke’s approach is an individual act of sacrifice for the good of the Resistance in *TLJ*. Luke’s reappearance (as a hologram) on the ice planet Crait at the film’s denouement marks an important point of engagement with the concept of sacrifice. Luke’s actions here directly meet expectation and results in the ultimate sacrifice, as the energy needed to project his holographic

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<sup>74</sup> [54] p. 23.

<sup>75</sup> [9] p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> The Prequel Trilogy consists of episodes I-III.

<sup>78</sup> For example, the prophecy given to Anakin Skywalker as the ‘Chosen One’ who would bring balance to the force – [40] p. 145.

<sup>79</sup> See ([9] p. 4); ([43] p. 156); ([12] p. 47).

<sup>80</sup> [9] p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> [46] p. 205. Luke Skywalker’s success in becoming a Jedi Knight; defeating the Emperor; and redeeming Anakin Skywalker over the course of the Original Trilogy can be seen as the fulfilment of the hope placed upon him by the Rebellion and his mentors (Obi Wan Kenobi and Yoda).

<sup>82</sup> [44].

image leads to Luke's death shortly after the event.<sup>83</sup> It will be argued that helping to protect the Resistance requires an act of sacrifice.

This sacrifice goes against the Jedi tradition to normally deny attachment and individual rights, and also the earlier discussed concept of emotion in the form of self-preservation brought about by fear. In the Old Trilogy of Star Wars films,<sup>84</sup> there was an emphasis on denying close connections. For example, Obi-Wan Kenobi's parting warning in *Return of the Jedi* is a caution to Luke about his feelings for his sister: 'Bury your feeling deep down, Luke. They do you credit, but they could be made to serve the Emperor'.<sup>85</sup> Ellerhoff has suggested that denying emotional attachments is a recurring theme for the Jedi.<sup>86</sup> Attachment is rejected by the Jedi in order to resist emotion. This theme has carried onto the sequel trilogy.

In the sequel trilogy Luke Skywalker denies his emotional attachment to Rey; his sister (Leia); and most importantly to his nephew (Kylo Ren/Ben Solo). In addition to rejecting emotional connections, his reclusive turn into obscurity can also be seen as an opposition to the fame and fortune that the membership of the Rebellion has brought him. By returning to Crait and engaging the invading First Order, Luke's sacrifice shows that he clearly again embraces his attachment to both his family and also to the Resistance but at the expense of the good of his own (human) rights.

Within public life human rights are becoming the dominant jurisprudential concept of public discourse.<sup>87</sup> The semiotic roots of Luke's sacrifice invokes George's natural law views on human worth which stem from the conclusion that the 'good is prior to the right, and, indeed, to rights'.<sup>88</sup> This is what I will term the 'goods-rights synthesis'. It follows for George that, 'human rights, are shaped, and given content, by the human goods they protect'.<sup>89</sup> Here human rights are seen to be dependent on human goods.

George draws from the Aristotelian notion that thinking agents are rational individuals. For this reason, flourishing can take place by promoting individual health and wellbeing;<sup>90</sup> for instance, through intellectual flourishing by reading a book. I argue that the 'goods-rights synthesis' engages human flourishing. This follows from the analysis

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<sup>83</sup> Sacrifice can be defined as 'giving up something valued for the sake of something else regarded as more important or worthy.' [11] p. 305. Luke's actions in *TLJ* can be considered as sacrificial because he gives up his life for a greater cause, namely, the Resistance.

<sup>84</sup> These are episodes IV – VII released 1977–1983.

<sup>85</sup> [44].

<sup>86</sup> [12] p. 47.

<sup>87</sup> [13] p. 269.

<sup>88</sup> [24] p. 117.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> [21] p. 103.

of George's thought that if goods are regarded as intrinsically valuable, then practical reasoning dictates that flourishing is contingent on our intellectual well-being, or our physical well-being.<sup>91</sup> As because the good is prior to the rights 'it gives shape, content to our rights.'<sup>92</sup> The good prior to the rights offers a level of protection.

Turning to Luke's narrative on the planet Crait, this proves connections with human flourishing. The goal is to rescue a movement, namely the Resistance, which will resist the First Order. Luke's decision to return to help the Resistance provides that the goods-rights synthesis can be seen to secure flourishing. The well-being of the Resistance is protected. Luke's duel with Kylo Ren/Ben Solo ensures that the remaining Resistance forces have time to escape the planet of Crait. A natural law critique establishes that Luke engages human flourishing through protecting the Resistance by first, securing the Resistance's survival in the face of annihilation; and second, through the Resistance being reborn as the Rebellion.

This level of protection is important because I claim that George's observation that human rights are being shaped and given content by 'the human goods they protect'<sup>93</sup> further justifies the 'goods-rights synthesis.' As introduced above, it can be considered in this sense that the 'goods-right synthesis' holds that the *good* is *prior* to the *right*, and even to the *rights*. Rights are not mere abstractions; instead, they are connected because they prescribe norms protecting human goods. George asserts that rights, like other moral principles, are intelligible as rational action guiding principles because they are specifications of practical reason that encourage human choosing to 'what is humanly fulfilling or enriching ... and away from what is contrary to our wellbeing as the kind of creatures we are i.e., human beings.'<sup>94</sup> This shows the prior application of George's new natural law theory to any rights discourse establishing liberty, such as human rights governed by the European Convention on Human Rights 1950 and Human Rights Act 1998 and, importantly, Luke's decision to disregard his own individual rights at the end of *TLJ*.

This is important because arguably the end of Luke's narrative is an example of him giving up his rights in order to work towards a larger good: the preservation of the Rebellion. By rescuing the Resistance this ensures the survival of a movement that will resist the First Order. Luke highlights this in his final act confronting Kylo Ren/Ben Solo on Crait: '[the] Rebellion is reborn today. The war is just beginning. And I will not be the last Jedi.'<sup>95</sup> Luke's act of defiance places the good involved in saving the galaxy before his own individual rights. As

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. George grounds this conception of human flourishing on the Aristotelian notion of *eudaimonia*.

<sup>92</sup> [24] p. 117.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid p. 117.

<sup>95</sup> [40].

such, analysing George's new natural law theory and applying this to the narrative suggests that Luke's sacrifice meets the 'goods-rights synthesis'. Luke's sacrifice is important because it is an instance where a new natural law lens can help to further understand the motion picture. The position taken by Luke Skywalker should be seen as 'salvific or hero-making. Luke Skywalker's actions ultimately help demonstrate this.'<sup>96</sup> Luke's sacrifice can be seen as an offering to save the Resistance as he provides his own symbolic form of mythical resistance. It is an understanding of sacrifice ultimately that has been shown to protect the Resistance and turn this movement into the Rebellion.

The goods-rights synthesis necessitates and promotes the good of the individual cause. The Rebellion is reborn by an individual act of good through Luke Skywalker sacrificing himself in order to face Kylo Ren and the forces of the First Order. A spark to ignite further growth is given in sacrifice.

## **7 Good based opposition**

Luke's act of defiance can be viewed as an act of liberty against oppression. As the First Order seeks to eliminate the remaining Resistance forces upon Crait, this requires Luke to take matters into his own hands and enter the battle in order to uphold a legal order. Luke leaving his isolated planet of Ach-To (albeit via hologram) is causally connected to the conflict on Crait.

The confrontation with Kylo Ren and First Order forces on Crait results in the earlier analysed sacrifice. This is an act of liberty taken against an oppressive force. This requires a new natural law focus upon the concept of liberty. Liberties and rights arise for George because there are basic human goods that constitute human flourishing. From this position George believes, '[t]he full defense of any particular liberty...requires the identification and defense of those human goods'.<sup>97</sup> The concept of liberty is hence linked to the goods. Liberty within the Public Square, and public square limits upon freedom, owe much to the secular vision presented by Isaiah Berlin.<sup>98</sup> Berlin presented two main conceptions of freedom: negative and positive liberty.<sup>99</sup> Modern Western society promotes negative liberty as manifested in the idea that individual liberty 'should be a purely private matter in which the state should not intervene, but which should not therefore, attempt to be too public'.<sup>100</sup> To draw contrast, George believes that consent to liberty should be given to people within the populous as this provides the opportunity for people to flourish. George believes liberty is necessary for individuals to flourish and

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<sup>96</sup> [46] p. 207.

<sup>97</sup> [24] p. 110.

<sup>98</sup> [49].

<sup>99</sup> [38] p. 202.

<sup>100</sup> [49].



thrive in line with the natural law. A new natural law analysis of this act suggests that liberty is essentially a human good;<sup>101</sup> a human good which would oppose the enforcement of law restricting liberty.<sup>102</sup>

New natural law analysis here suggests that George enlarges the good to encompass the natural rights discourse to provide a 'good based opposition'.<sup>103</sup> George considers that the good comprises the (natural) right to provide this 'good based opposition'.<sup>104</sup> The restriction upon liberty imposed by the First Order requires the normative response given by Skywalker. This presents a basic good based opposition to the oppression of liberty and enforcement of tyranny.

The state of the galaxy in *TLJ* requires the actions taken by Luke. It was earlier noted that in the preceding motion picture, *The Force Awakens*,<sup>105</sup> the First Order destroyed the planet Hosnian Prime. In other words, there was no form of government upholding a legal order present at the time of Luke's actions in *TLJ*. It has been suggested, however, that the natural law acts as a guiding limit upon authority. In *The Clash of Orthodoxies*, for instance, George asserts that the natural law 'does not dictate an answer to the question of its own enforcement.'<sup>106</sup> George suggests, the 'natural law itself requires that some-one (or some group of persons or some institution) exercise authority in political communities'.<sup>107</sup> As such, the authority to enforce natural law norms may be vested primarily or exclusively with the legislature. A considerable measure of such authority may also be granted to the judiciary, via the natural law, as a check on legislative power.<sup>108</sup> As there is no form of legislature or judiciary in the Star Wars galaxy at the time of *TLJ*, were the actions taken by Luke valid?

George's new natural law theory recognises the authority of law to restrain authority based upon law's inherent nature for the good of the individual. For instance, in the context of the United States of America's approach to abortion following *Roe v Wade* (1973),<sup>109</sup> George controversially suggests that the 'failure of the American democracy to fulfil their responsibilities has created what is truly a crisis'.<sup>110</sup> Consequently, George's conservative approach provides a wider limit to the scope of the natural law to constrain a powerful authority.<sup>111</sup> Luke's actions

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<sup>101</sup> [23] p. 229.

<sup>102</sup> This is a conclusion supported by Trigg, who further connects any restriction of the good to a restriction of human nature [52] p. 25.

<sup>103</sup> [24] p. 114.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> [2].

<sup>106</sup> [25] p. 179.

<sup>107</sup> [23] pp. 107-108.

<sup>108</sup> [25] p. 179.

<sup>109</sup> [48].

<sup>110</sup> [25] p. 135.

<sup>111</sup> For example, to highlight the limits of moral paternalism, George draws upon Hobbesian thought in the Hart/Devlin debate. This is to suggest that HLA Hart's view of the moral paternalist position offered by Lord Devlin would be akin to

can be seen as an attempt to curb crises and restore order, unlike Hobbesian theory which was compared to the politics of the First Order. The natural law can be used as an arbiter against oppression and restriction in line with divine revelation informed by George's Catholicism.<sup>112</sup> Applying George's theory of new natural law may reach the conclusion that a good based opposition to a restriction to the good of liberty can be seen in Luke's opposition to the First Order.

## **8 Luke's movement from the state of nature – an attempt to restore public morality**

It was earlier introduced that a Hobbesian influence can be seen in George's insistence upon individual rights. For example, in *De Cive*, Hobbes categorised the first foundation of natural rights as one of self-preservation.<sup>113</sup> This concept is an important contribution made by Hobbesian thought. This concept has certainly been used by George – one of the incommensurable basic goods is 'Life' and the attaching right to protect life.<sup>114</sup> Building upon this within *Conscience and its Enemies*, George has drawn influence from Hobbes by insisting on natural rights held by the individual against the state, in particular against 'overreaching governments.'<sup>115</sup> As such, natural rights play an important part in holding the state to account. George takes this idea as a form of natural rights defence against the state.<sup>116</sup> As was established in the previous section, George enlarges the good to encompass the natural rights discourse.<sup>117</sup> This completes a movement narrowing theological conceptions of natural law to a discourse surrounding non-theological designations of natural rights.<sup>118</sup> In this section the concept of public morality will be introduced and analysed. This section will show how law as a public morality can provide a legal restraint to the First Order. This is because the concept of public morality is helpful in negotiating the boundaries over natural rights.

As the First Order are subject to minimal legal restraint, George's new natural law can again prove to be helpful because it was earlier established that, under his jurisprudence, law is a public morality. It has been noted that George is shown to adopt a concept of public morality.<sup>119</sup> For example 'law is the only public morality that we

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Hobbes' state of nature. From this position George effectively critiques both the liberal paternalist position adopted by Hart and the State of Nature provided by Hobbes. [21] p. 67.

<sup>112</sup> [23] p. 229.

<sup>113</sup> [37] Ch I, 13-14; [36] I i, 7.

<sup>114</sup> [29] p. 91.

<sup>115</sup> [24] p. 114.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> [21] pp. 31-33, 89; [24] p. 169; [23] p. 83. Natural law in this movement is removed from theological Judaeo-Christian Scholastic conceptions and oriented towards a secular natural rights basis. See [53] p. 8; [47] pp. 136, 140.

<sup>119</sup> [29] p. 20.

can have.<sup>120</sup> Law is needed to protect the boundaries over our natural rights. *Making Men Moral*<sup>121</sup> argues that the natural law can legitimately contribute to the legal enforcement of morality.<sup>122</sup> It was suggested above that under George's approach, law by shaping morality directs a public morality 'based on certain civil interests.'<sup>123</sup> These civil interests are those which reasonable people share, and certain principles of liberty and equality that reasonable people are prepared to affirm, regardless of ideology.<sup>124</sup> A broad church of civil interests are incorporated under public morality. George thus proposes a public morality based upon reasonable liberty, and law is seen to be a form of public morality that secures individual rights to liberty and equality.

This broad spectrum of civil interests can apply to the Skywalker narrative. The imminent destruction of the Resistance and Skywalker's withdrawal from the galactic stage support the conclusion that the state of nature present at the time of *TLJ* requires intervention by Skywalker. Skywalker's morality is needed to curb the behaviour of the First Order.

This once again raises questions about Luke's response. Luke was earlier identified in this article as the protagonist 'hero'. It is common ground that most would not accept the atrocities (murder/political uprising/terrorism) committed by the First Order. A form of legal order needs to be imposed to restrain these heinous actions. The concept of public morality is dependent upon law. For instance, as it was earlier suggested that for George law is a form of public morality in a movement from the state of nature.<sup>125</sup> This is helpful because George believes that the common good of public morality generates obligations in justice,<sup>126</sup> being generated in order to preserve morals.<sup>127</sup> In particular these morals and obligations in justice would be in line with George's Catholicism. The destructive actions committed by the First Order would be contrary to public morality, and hence the natural law. Luke's narrative symbolising public morality derives from the requirement to uphold public morality against the actions of the First Order.

George's understanding that governmental respect for individual freedom and the autonomy of governmental spheres of authority is a requirement of political morality<sup>128</sup> follows because law and government fundamentally exist to protect human persons and their well-being. The destruction brought about by the First Order directly

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> [21].

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid p. 27.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> [24] pp. 91-92.

<sup>126</sup> [30] p. 19.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> [24] pp. 91-92.

violates human rights and prevents individual human flourishing.<sup>129</sup> Luke's actions can be seen as an attempt to restore public morality and safeguard natural rights in the face of great opposition. For instance, Luke's duel with Kylo Ren and confrontation with the military forces of the First Order on Crait are an example of Luke trying to protect and promote human flourishing. A narrative is made to uphold reasonable liberty through individual action. As such, a natural law reading here provides understanding about Luke's interventionist approach on Crait in opposition to the First Order. Law as a public morality helps us to understand the effective restraint that Luke poses to a militant force.

## 9 Conclusion

By using legal idealism in the form of a new natural law lens, this article has analysed Luke's journey in *TLJ* from an isolated, fallen hero to the triumphant, returning hero and protector. Luke's narrative has been situated within a theoretical context that has analysed the legal and political morality of Luke in *TLJ* and so has illustrated the film's wider relevance.

To examine this narrative, George's new natural law theory required further analysis. A movement has been shown in that while the Hobbesian condition provides a starting point for natural law teaching and identifies a state of nature, George proposes a method to move from the state of nature. George was shown to reject social contractarianism and provide natural rights protection against the state. Following from this observation George's new natural law reasoning has been applied to themes and concepts in Skywalker narrative and by doing so this has rationalised Luke's opposition towards the First Order. The contrast between Skywalker's morality and the behaviour of the First Order has been established. The Skywalker narrative has been shown to symbolise public morality against the politics of the First Order driven by principles of power and fear. Law, as a public morality, has been shown to provide an effective restraint to the politics of the First Order. This is because it has been argued that in the narrative Luke is himself the 'Resistance' that reignites the spark in the Rebellion. Although Luke's spark is extinguished in his sacrifice, this will (presumably) live on in the future films through the rebirth of the Rebellion.

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<sup>129</sup> It was earlier discussed that the First Order destroyed both the Galactic Senate and New Republic.

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